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OTTAWA FOR JAMES STEELE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHSA](#) [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [CASC](#)

SUBJECT: SEAL HUNT PROTESTS: THE ANNUAL CONTROVERSY AND ARRESTS

REF: A. A. HALIFAX 0023 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. B. HALIFAX 0024 (NOTAL)

[1](#)1. Summary: Animal rights activist Paul Watson has seen Canadian authorities tow his vessel the "Farley Mowat" into Sydney, Nova Scotia and his two key officers arrested in connection with his traditional battle to stop Canada's seal hunt. End Summary.

[1](#)2. The annual seal hunt off Canada's east coast is now fully underway along with the traditional bitter confrontation between seal hunters and animal rights activists. As in previous years, Paul Watson, the controversial founder and head of the U.S.-based Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, is one of the higher-profile protestors who has a long track record of trying to disrupt the hunt. On the other side are those who support the hunt either because of its economic importance to rural communities in eastern Canada, or because of its role in controlling the size of the seal herds. The sealing industry receives considerable political support, primarily from the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) which manages and exercises jurisdiction over the hunt. The current federal minister in charge of DFO is Newfoundland-Labrador Member of Parliament Loyola Hearn, who also represents his province in the federal cabinet and is zealous in his support of the hunt.

[1](#)3. DFO carries out its responsibilities in managing the hunt with the coordination of the Canadian Coast Guard, which is a division of DFO. Also involved is Transport Canada which has jurisdiction over vessel safety regulations and enforcement assistance is provided through Canada's federal police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). This year's hunt and the corresponding protest season got underway on March 20 when Transport Canada asserted that Watson's vessel the "Farley Mowat", registered in the Netherlands, violated international marine safety conventions. Transport Canada subsequently ordered the vessel not to enter Canadian waters on two different occasions. Minister Hearn asserted that the vessel did not respond to these orders and went on to enter Canadian waters. The minister also alleged that the vessel engaged in activities in violation of Canada's Marine Mammal regulations, as contained in Canada's Fisheries Act and which pertain to the minimum requirement for the distance between ships and seal hunters. These infractions allegedly took place on March 30 in Canadian waters in the Northumberland Strait near Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Minister Hearn claimed that when the vessel did not respond to these charges he asked the RCMP to board and seize the vessel and then have the Coast Guard tow the vessel to Sydney, Nova Scotia. This boarding took place on April 12, and Canadian authorities have since impounded the vessel in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The vessel's Captain and First Officer were arrested for the charges relating to the mammal regulations, and some crew members who refused to process through Canadian

customs were temporarily detained. Details of the arrest of the American crew members involved in this case are found in reftels. Post is unaware of any official Dutch response to the boarding and seizure of the "Farley Mowat".

14. Comment: The seizure of the vessel and the fate of its crew has turned into a high profile event, with both sides vying for international media attention. Post will continue to report significant developments relating to Watson's next steps and how Minister Hearn responds. End comment.

FOSTER